

MODERN CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUNG PEOPLE – FOCUS ON THEIR EDUCATION AND REALIZATION ON LABOUR MARKET

Kamelia Petkova

Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

1000, Sofia, Bulgaria

kamelia.petkova@gmail.com

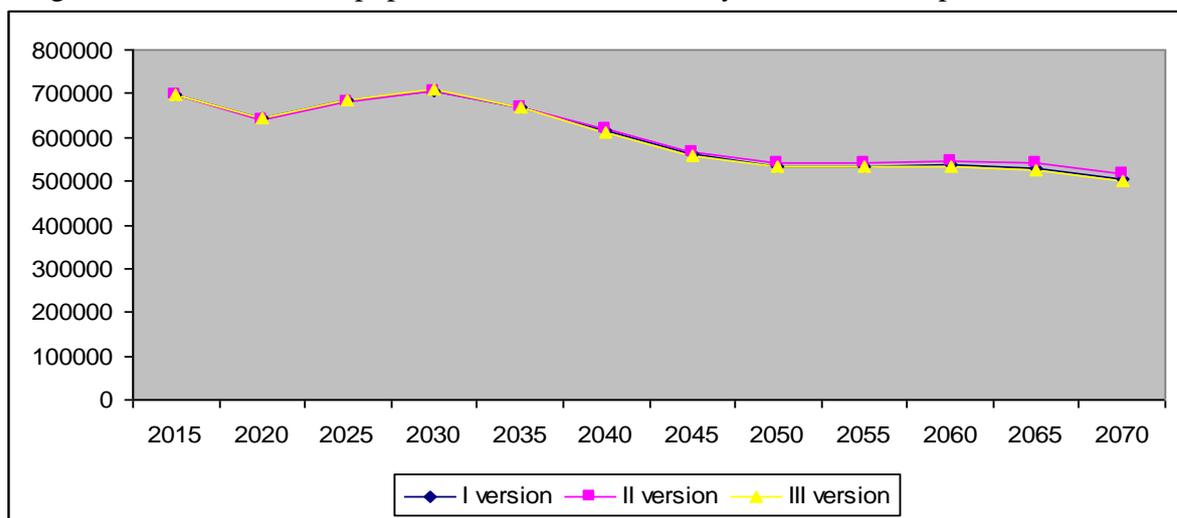
Abstract

In recent years, the contemporary social, economic and demographic reality poses a number of challenges for young people, one of which is the search for opportunities for successful personal and professional development. In line with European policy on socio-economic development in the context of the strategic priorities set out in several European papers, young people are becoming an important social category. How they have the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies that enable them to participate actively in building an economy based on knowledge and competitiveness are questions that we will try to look for an answer.

Key words: knowledge, young people, skills, abilities

In the past years the modern social, economic and demographic reality poses a number of challenges faced by young people¹, one of which is the searching of opportunities for successful personal and professional development. The negative demographic trends and consequences are well known facts which the demographic crisis influences on the composition and structure of the population. According to National Statistical Institute (NSI) data, in 2015 the total number of young people in the country amounted on 168 6196 (www.nsi.bg). In long term, the forecast of NSI shows that by 2020 the number of young people is expected to continue declining particularly steep this will affect the age groups between 20 – 24 and 25 – 29 years old (www.nsi.bg)

Figure. 1. Forecast of the population between 20 – 24 years old for the period 2015 – 2070



Source: NSI

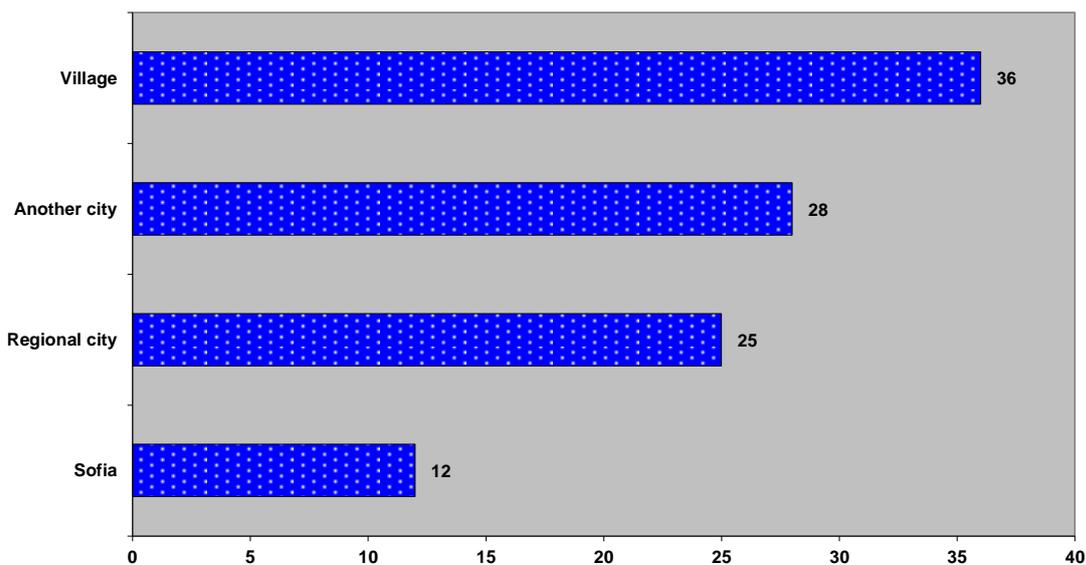
Note: I option: it is defined as realistic and consistent with regulatory requirements of the European Union for demographic and socio-economic development of member states; II option: it is supposed that the demographic development will take place under favorable socio-economic

¹ According to UN definition young people are persons between the age of 15 and 24

processes in the country; III option: in this case, the development of the population is projected at hypothesis for adverse socio-economic processes in the country.

The problem for young people and the challenges they faced in the context of the today's dynamic reality is becoming more urgent and with important economic dimensions. The results of the 2013 national representative survey of UNICEF show that an absolutely negative tendency is outlined in the recent years in Bulgaria. The trend is associated to significant increase of the group of young people who don't practice any work activity or make efforts for improving their educational level (UNICEF 2015). Particularly striking are the data when considering regional profile of these individuals. According to the survey the majority part of the young people in Bulgaria fall into the NEETs group (not in employment, education or training) live in small towns (63%) (UNICEF 2015). That means that the inversely proportion of dependence is empirically verified and is expressed in increasing the proportion of young people from the group of NEETs in the villages, unlike big cities (UNICEF, 2015). The concrete data show that in villages the NEETs proportion is almost three times greater than that in the NEETs in Sofia and two times greater than that in regional towns. Therefore, the profile of young people in Bulgaria is about to change, either under the pressure of demographic changes or under the influence of the socio-economic situation of the country (UNICEF 2015).

Figure 2. Structure of the young people, who are neither in employment, nor in education or training by regions (%).

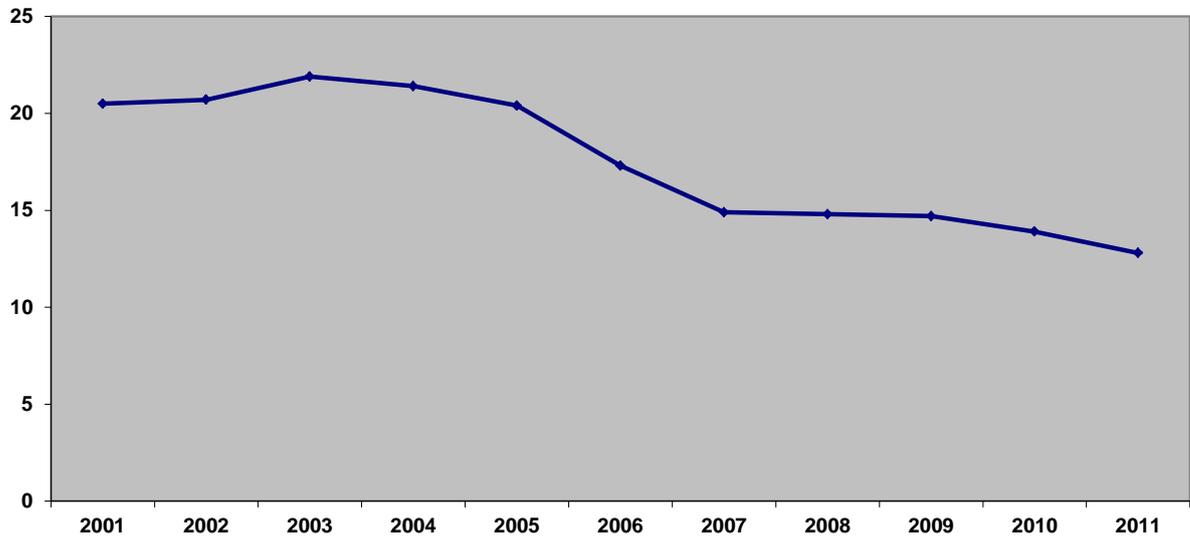


Source: UNICEF: 2015:24

It is well known that the education and availability of professional knowledge and skills are important characteristics that define and facilitate the transition from school to the labour market of the young people. According to Eurofound study „NEETs – Young people not in employment, education or training: Characteristics, costs and policy responses in Europe“ in 2012, young people with lower education level are endangered three times greater to fall in the group of inactive that those with higher education degree (UNICEF 2015:21). In this case, the education is perceived as a value and a prerequisite of success. On practice, however, data from the official statistics for 2012/13 show that there is a still high proportion in the country of individuals aged 18 -24 who prematurely drop out of school (12,5%). This means that every seventh/eighth youth in Bulgaria has

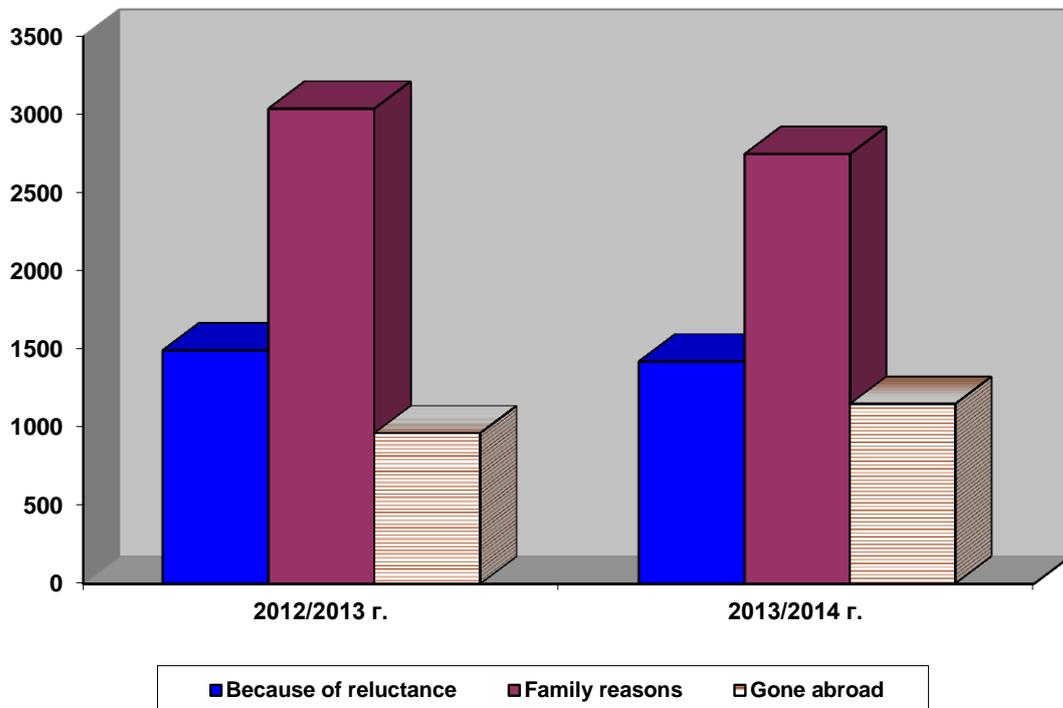
left school before completing his secondary education (www.nsi.bg). For comparison, in European Union the early dropping out reaches 11.9% in 2013, compared to 12,7 % in 2012 and 14,9% in 2007 (www.nsi.bg).

Figure 3. Early school leavers aged 18 – 24 (unfinished secondary school)



Source: National Youth Strategy:11

Figure 4. A number of dropouts at IX-XII/XIII grade and reasons for leaving



Source: Education in Bulgaria, 2015: 104

Along with above mentioned negative tendencies connected to educational level of young

people, another extremely disturbing result is retaining a high proportion of functionally² illiterate persons in this age group. According to the study, in 2012 the proportion of functionally illiterate Bulgarian children between the age of 15 and 16 was 44 % for mathematic and 39 % in reading (Flash Eurobarometer. Youth on the move 2012). The transition from education to employment of the young people is further impeded by the changes which occur in their cultural model. It is obvious that the interest among young people for reading books collapsing. The sociological data shows that only 16% of the students in school, 29 % of students in the universities, 13% employed people read books while only 8 % of the unemployed persons spend their spare time in enriching their personal culture (National Representative Survey of Mediana Agency for 2011). Another interesting result is that despite the massive introduction of information technologies in life and at work, young people information access is still limited comparing to their peers from many European countries. The proportion of the persons aged 16 – 24 who use computer daily is 82% (compared to EU averaged – 95 %), unlike the next aged group: 25 – 34, the proportion is 42 % (compared with EU – 64%). (PISA, 2012).

Except the abovementioned challenges should note the fact that Bulgaria is a country in which like the situation in many European countries the level of youth employment is higher compared to the older population. According to Eurostat in 2014 the average monthly level of this ratio for age group to 24 years old in Bulgaria is 23.6 % or with 1.5 percentage points higher from the average level for EU (22.1 %) (Annual of the Employment Agency for 2014: 31-32). Countries where the rate of youth employment is significantly higher are Spain (53.2%), Greece (52.3 %) and Croatia (45%) (Annual of the Employment Agency for 2014: 31-32). Compared with the last year, the data shows decline in the level of youth unemployment in European context (-4.8%) as well as on national level (- 4.8%) (Annual of the Employment Agency for 2014: 31-32). Despite the reported progress on the employment policy for our target group, in the specialized literature are available number of studies warning on the presence of multiple accompanying problems faced by young people who want to start working, namely:

- Lack of experience which causes difficulties as finding first job and as switching from one to another type of employment. Young people tend to change fairly often their work place to find the position that fully satisfied them. This is a natural consequence of their social status and the ability to rely on financially support of their parents/ relatives and others. The lack of experience has an impact on the job seeking process (habits for tracking job announcements, participation in competitions and interviews, searching assistance from specialized government institutions, agencies, etc.) (Flash Eurobarometer. Youth on the move 2012)

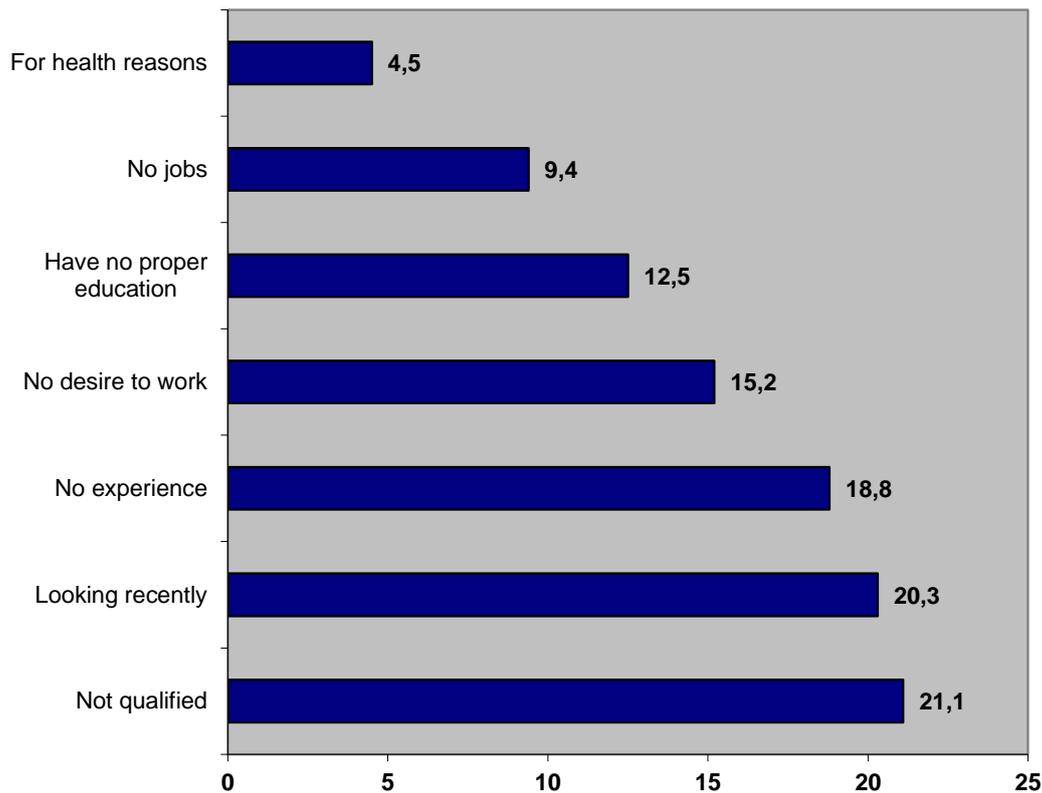
- Lower labour productivity: in the most cases in the viewed target group there is a lower labour productivity which is a consequence mostly from the above mentioned lack of experience but also from the mismatch between business needs and quality of education.

- Lack of qualification related to the low level of education:

Figure 5. Why haven't you started work yet? (in %)

² Referring to the definition in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), functionally illiterate are considered those individuals who do not have basic skills in reading and mathematics, and there is: a lack of key skills and inability to practical application of what they have learned in school; lack of skills for orientation and adaptation on the labor market and hence - the inability to complete realization (PISA, 2012)

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Source: UNICEF: 2015:39

➤ Lack of professional contacts affecting mostly on youths who want to develop their own business. According to many authors, the existence of a good and long enough credit history, a network of business contacts and knowing the necessary steps and techniques to start business are the major obstacles to youth entrepreneurship. Results of the Eurobarometer survey on “Youth on the move” show that Bulgarian youths demonstrate a greater initiative for starting a business (74%), comparing to their peers from EU which clearly shows that young people manifest their willingness for development regardless the condition in the country (Flash Eurobarometer. Youth on the move 2012)

➤ The participation of youths in undeclared employment could be seen as another specific accompanying problem that is related to finding a job. On one hand participation of the young people in informal sector helps them to gain experience and build contacts and on the other ensures higher net payment of what could potentially get in formal economy. Meanwhile, the enduring application of undeclared work could have negative long-term consequences on their future realization in terms of finding higher-paid job in formal economy, but also could cause a negative impact when they want to access credit. Because of their professional and social status, young people are more easily convinced to enter in unregulated relations or moving from regulated to unregulated relations under pressure from employer.

From everything said so far we could conclude that important and fundamental feature of youth community in the last 20 years is its dynamic change. This change is due to the changed demographic character of our country and the increasingly rich possibilities that labor markets for self-realization and successful career offer. In conditions of depopulation and fierce competition, increasingly numbers of young people face difficulties and many problems in the transition from

education to employment and finding a first job. In order to overcome these problems is required a better coherence and complementarity of different policies on the labor market, education, demographic policy, which ultimately lead to providing more opportunities for further education to obtain advanced knowledge and skills. Several studies warn on the need for changes in the education system for better connection between education and practice, better coordination between businesses and schools, promoting inclusion in literacy courses for illiterate persons; participation in informal training which can give the necessary knowledge of young people for decent realization. Offering various alternatives for flexible working conditions and distance working would provide an opportunity to the young people for more mobility and financial independence. This in turn will contribute to the resurgence of economic growth in some of depopulated and aging areas where the demand of labour force in working age is faced more often.

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